



Improving the mental health of rural New South Wales communities facing drought and other adversities

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Abstract:

OBJECTIVE: NSW has just experienced its worst drought in a century. As years passed with insufficient rain, drought-related mental health problems became evident on farms. Our objective is to describe how, in response, the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program was introduced in 2007 to raise awareness of drought-related mental health needs and help address these needs in rural and remote NSW. The program has since expanded to include other forms of rural adversity, including recent floods. **SETTING:** Rural NSW. **DESIGN, PARTICIPANTS, INTERVENTIONS:** Designed around community development principles, health, local service networks and partner agencies collaborated to promote mental health, education and early intervention. Strategies included raising mental health literacy, organising community social events and disseminating drought-related information. Priority areas were Aboriginal communities, older farmers, young people, women, primary health care and substance use. **RESULTS:** Over 3000 people received mental health literacy training in the four years of operation from 2007 to 2010. Stakeholders collaborated to conduct hundreds of mental health-related events attended by thousands of people. A free rural mental health support telephone line provided crisis help and referral to rural mental health-related services. **CONCLUSION:** Drought affected mental health in rural NSW. A community development model was accepted and considered effective in helping communities build capacity and resilience in the face of chronic drought-related hardship. Given the scale, complexity and significance of drought impacts and rural adjustment, and the threats posed by climate change, a long-term approach to funding such programs would be appropriate.

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Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience:

audience to whom the resource is directed

Health Professional, Policymaker, Public



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Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Extreme Weather Event

Extreme Weather Event: Drought, Flooding

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Rural

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Australasia

Health Co-Benefit/Co-Harm (Adaption/Mitigation):

specification of beneficial or harmful impacts to health resulting from efforts to reduce or cope with greenhouse gases

A focus of content

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Mental Health/Stress

Mental Health Effect/Stress: Stress Disorder

Intervention:

strategy to prepare for or reduce the impact of climate change on health

A focus of content

Medical Community Engagement:

resource focus on how the medical community discusses or acts to address health impacts of climate change

A focus of content

Mitigation/Adaptation:

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Population of Concern:

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

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Children, Elderly, Low Socioeconomic Status, Racial/Ethnic Subgroup

Other Racial/Ethnic Subgroup: Aboriginal communities

Other Vulnerable Population: Women

Resource Type: 

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Resilience: 

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

Timescale: 

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment: 

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content